

Inaccessible Worlds: A Possible Worlds Narrative Analysis of Select Modernist Texts

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## Introduction

Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* are three texts which exemplify the Modernist period of British literature. In order to understand how these three disparate texts relate to each other and to their common historical moment, it is helpful to apply an independent metric by which they can be compared and contrasted. To that end, the work done on Possible Worlds Theory by Marie-Laure Ryan is well-suited. Using the ideas found in Ryan's book *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, I will explore these three novels to understand how they relate both to each other and to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

Ryan writes that a possible world is "a set of propositions modalized by the operator of the so-called *alethic* system: possible, impossible and necessary" (111). A necessary claim is a logical truth which must necessarily hold true under all circumstances – bachelors are unmarried men, for instance. An impossible claim is a logical falsehood that cannot be true under any circumstances – for instance,  $2 + 2 = 7$ . Claims which are not logically impossible or necessary fall into the category of possible. It is these possible claims that make up the bulk of any given possible world – some of these possibilities will be actualized while the rest will remain unactualized. Possible worlds are defined by which possibilities are actualized.

The real world in which we all live can easily be described in this context. For example, the propositions "a cure for cancer will be discovered," "Germany won World War II," and "Neil Armstrong walked on the moon" are all possible in the *alethic* sense. But when we examine which propositions are actualized as opposed to those that are merely possible, a sense of reality emerges. The cure for cancer is possible and has not

yet been actualized, though it may become actualized at some point in the future; the claim that Germany won the second world war was not actualized, and will remain forever as a mere possibility rather than an actual fact. The claim that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon was actualized.

This same system, Ryan writes, can be used to assess properties of a fictional world. Each text has a “Textual Actual World” (TAW) which serves as the “real world” for the characters of that text. Surrounding this TAW are various Alternative Possible Worlds, or APWs, defined by properties which differ from each other and from the TAW. As the plot of the novel unfolds, most APWs remain in the domain of the merely possible as a select few are actualized. Ryan refers to this arrangement of a central TAW surrounded by infinite APWs as a “textual universe.”

Possible Worlds Theory allows us to understand the way the myriad worlds of a text interact to form the plot of any given narrative. Ryan’s model takes each book as its own universe, and from page one the story can develop in any one of an infinite number of patterns. Each of these patterns is a plot sequence which actualizes a specific series of possible worlds. By the last page, the infinite potential of the first page has been distilled into a concrete story. In this way, Ryan argues, plot is what happens when the text moves from possible world to possible world, actualizing one after another.

Using Ryan’s Possible Worlds model, this thesis will examine the narrative universes of *Parade’s End*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Ulysses*. This approach will first require a summary of Ryan’s work as it is applicable to this project – specifically, an explanation of how multiple modal systems can be used to generate an infinite number of

possible worlds within a narrative universe and how the actualization of some possible worlds and the bracketing off of others through time generates plot.

To add structure to this analysis, I have chosen three themes which manifest themselves in multiple Modernist texts, each playing out in at least two of the novels here discussed. The first involves the suicide of a father. The second deals with the spurning of meaningful friendship or union. The third theme revolves around a conflation between birth and death, old age and infancy. Each of these themes not only has a direct impact on how the characters involved interact with their world but also, by evoking the sweeping changes which characterize early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe vis-à-vis the Great War, serves to situate each text in a specific moment in history.

The advantage of such an approach is that I am not limited to points where all three novels agree. Since my structure allows me to play two novels against a third for each theme, any dissenting narrative that emerges is as meaningful as the other two. Where Joyce and Ford each show a father's suicide, Woolf's Mr. Ramsay remains conspicuously alive throughout the text; in spite of initial misgivings, Christopher Tietjens and Valentine Wannop do eventually accept each other and finish the novel together; and finally, in an anticlimax of bitter irony, Mina Purefoy does give birth to a healthy child at the end of *Ulysses* – a promise of future generations, if not future Blooms.

By using these three themes to compare and contrast the narrative universes presented by these novels, I will create a meaningful communion not only between the three texts but also between the texts and the early twentieth century. These themes can each also be read metaphorically, as elegiac fugues for a world destroyed in the Great

War. A father's suicide is a lost past; an inexplicable inability to relate to others is a lost present; death as the inevitable consequence of birth is a lost future.

### Possible Worlds Theory

Before I can commence with a thorough reading of the novels in this context, it's important to establish the relevance of Ryan's work on Possible Worlds Theory. In *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, Ryan proposes a possible-worlds model for understanding narrative. Borrowing heavily from the work of early 20<sup>th</sup> century logicians – who were in turn working with an older Leibnizian model – Ryan sees a narrative as its own universe, populated by countless APWs vying for control (16).

When we read a text, Ryan tells us, we must “recenter” our perspective. As through a game of make believe, both the author and the reader enter into the TAW and tacitly agree to treat it as though it were the real world. This grants the properties of the TAW a privileged status – they “exist;” they are the relevant “truths” with which the characters of the text must contend.

Characters, to the extent that they function as living and thinking beings, have their own values and perspectives. These values and perspectives can also be registered within the framework of possible worlds theory, but in order to accommodate them we need to step away from the *alethic* system (introduced earlier as consisting of the possible/impossible/necessary) and introduce a few new modalities. Using what Ryan calls the *deontic* system, properties are classified using the concepts of permission, prohibition or obligation. The *axiological* system maps all properties in terms of goodness, badness or indifference. Finally, the *epistemic* system allows us to discuss properties using knowledge, ignorance and belief. Each of these modalities allows us to create a possible world which reflects certain subjective elements of a character's experience of the TAW (111).



For instance, using the *deontic* system we are able to generate what Ryan refers to as the O-World. It is here that a character's moral sense lies. The O-World is a map of the character's views about societal obligations – as stated earlier, any given property can be permitted, prohibited or obligatory. If we take “having an adulterous relationship with Valentine” as our property, we can see that Christopher Tietjens at the start of *Parade's End* would deem it to be prohibited; however, as the novel progresses, the weight of this prohibition diminishes and he acts on his desire – which is represented by what Ryan calls the W-World, or Wish-World.

We must turn to the *axiological* system of modality in order to create a W-World. It is pretty clear even in the first book that Christopher Tietjens would like to pursue a relationship with Valentine. Consummating their mutual affection would be desirable, as opposed to undesirable or simply neutral, and in fact we need to look elsewhere in the narrative universe (in this case, to Christopher's O-World) to understand why he rejects something that he wants so badly.

Finally, the *epistemic* modal system helps us to create a K-World, which represents a character's knowledge of the world around him or her. K-Worlds are by far the most complex of the three subjective systems here explored because they act as an intermediate layer between the TAW and the subjective experience of the character. Instead of interacting directly with the TAW, a character's thoughts and actions are predicated on their understanding of the TAW, which is what the K-World captures.

In a first person narration, the K-World of the narrator is effectively indistinguishable from the TAW because we lack any higher narrative authority. The K-world of the narrator consists of “known properties,” “believed properties” and “ignored

properties.” However, none of the texts discussed here is limited to first-person narration – each author provides us with a world more complex than any single character’s understanding of it. Ryan writes that “In a third-person perspective, the modal operators of the K-world are computed by comparing the truth value assigned to a proposition by the subject with the objective truth value in the reference world...The three operators mean respectively agreement, indeterminacy and disagreement” (115).

In other words, in a third-person text, the K-World is used to describe how accurate a given character’s understanding of the world is. This is accomplished by comparing that character’s understanding of a proposition (as either true, false or indeterminate) with the reality of the situation as manifested in the TAW. If a character’s K-World is in agreement with the TAW, then that character has a good understanding of the world; if it is in disagreement with the TAW, then that character is laboring under some degree of misapprehension. For example, the proposition “Christopher Tietjens had an affair with Valentine” is false in the early stages of Ford’s TAW but, due to misinformation and slander, is wrongly categorized as a belief in the K-World of Christopher’s father. His K-World is in disagreement with the TAW in this respect.

These three worlds – the O-, W- and K-Worlds – work together to comprise the entirety of a character’s experience. A character will use her K-World in order to act to satisfy her W-World without compromising her O-World.

The characters in a narrative are playing a game: their goal, as Ryan writes, is “to make the TAW coincide with as many as possible of their private worlds” (119). We understand, then, Ryan’s definition of plot as “the trace left by the movement of these [alternative possible] worlds within the textual universe” (119). As the TAW actualizes

various APWs, it naturally tends to satisfy the O-, W- and K-Worlds of some characters while upsetting the O-, W- and K-Worlds of others.

It would be perfectly feasible to apply Ryan's theory to these three novels in a very straightforward way: I could treat *Parade's End* as a novel about O-Worlds, *Ulysses* as a novel about W-Worlds, and *To the Lighthouse* as a novel about K-Worlds. The differences between these novels are at least partly rooted in their treatment of the subjective experiences of their characters, broken down in exactly such a manner. To do so would allow me to contrast the novels while highlighting Ryan's theory in action – but it would not allow me to compare the novels, at least not to a degree that would permit an understanding of how they interact. It would create artificial distinctions which, while useful to a certain extent, grossly simplify the characters and plots. Rather, I find it much more compelling to explore how desire, obligation and understanding are tied together in each novel's protagonists as I examine the various themes presented by Ford, Woolf and Joyce.

### Father's Suicide

“Someone had blundered!” roars Mr. Ramsay, throughout the first section of *To the Lighthouse*. He’s reciting Tennyson’s glorification of Victorian ideals, “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” The poem recounts an incident during the Crimean War – someone “blundered” and ordered a 662-man cavalry unit to conduct a charge against a heavily fortified position on the far side of a valley rimmed on both sides with enemy guns. The order was obviously a mistake, and the mission was obviously suicidal – but such trivialities didn’t concern the members of the Light Brigade, who rode valiantly to their deaths. This perfectly encapsulates the stunning power of the *deontic* modal system vis-a-vis the Victorian mentality: orders are to be followed without question. The O-World is to be preserved even at the cost of life itself. Tennyson’s poem is a celebration of this O-World idealism, praising the men for their actions:

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
Was there a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
    Someone had blunder'd:  
Their's not to make reply,  
Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
    Rode the six hundred.

It is this same glorification of obligation and deification of honor that informs the value system of the British Aristocracy during the turn of the century and up to World War One. The modernists see this as problematic at best: Ford makes this O-World mentality the subject of his *Parade's End*, and Joyce situates his characters by having them relate in various ways to this Victorian mentality. Each author uses the suicide of a character’s father to explore the relevance of O-World values as heritable properties,

granting historical and cultural context to a new generation but at the cost, as the O-World necessarily operates as a restriction on autonomy, of some degree of freedom

Old Tietjens of Groby, senior to Mark and Christopher Tietjens, exists outside of the novel as a sort of a foil to its protagonists. A proper gentleman, he's lived a long life of proper Victorian values. He believes in his sons, he believes in his country and he believes in his class, all characteristics which instill within him a strong sense of honor, and he has passed this ideal down to his children. In Ryan's terms, he is a man ruled by his O-World, and he takes pride in this fact. He's been kind to those less fortunate than himself, having helped the widow Wannop, and he's indulgent with his children – he is willing to fund the lascivious lifestyle in which he assumes Christopher to be indulging.

When he hears the false rumor that Christopher has taken up illicitly with the daughter of one of his oldest friends, he does the honorable thing – he makes arrangements for both Christopher and Valentine to live comfortably and without scandal, then he gets drunk and commits suicide. Even his suicide, staged as a hunting accident, demonstrates his unwillingness to create a social disruption or to act in some way inappropriately – it's almost considerate of him to commit suicide in way that will allow his sons to accept the condolences of their peers without having to act ashamed.

These same values – this same Yorkshire pride, this magnanimous compassion, and this preference of death to dishonor – can be found in both of his sons, at least at the beginning of the novel. It's one of the most touching and most amusing moments in the book when Christopher and Mark meet and get to know each other for the first time; they each find that it's like talking to a mirror.

Compassion seems to be a Tietjens family trait: Mark is very kind to Christopher, to Valentine, and to almost anyone less fortunate than himself, and Christopher makes a point of loaning money to anyone who asks. The pride, meanwhile, is repeatedly characterized as a Yorkshire quality (“I thought you were a soft sort of bloke,” says Mark. “I’m as North Riding as yourself!” comes Christopher’s reply.) The suicidal sense of honor, however, seems to stem not from their family or their county of origin but rather from their class.

The subject of the Tietjens saga is this sense of honor. We see its appeal when we watch Christopher silently maintain the moral high ground in every conflict, but we watch it destroy the Tietjens family and almost destroy Christopher himself as his own sense of honor sends him bounding to the front lines in a similarly “considerate” suicide attempt. In the end, we watch Mark succumb: he follows his father, the Light Brigade and the values of the *ancien regime* into death.

To return to a possible worlds approach, this entire mentality can be seen as predicated on an overwhelming O-World – if a character’s K-World differs substantially from the character’s O-World, that character sees himself living in a state of dishonor. When this dishonor is seen as irrevocable, such characters give up on the narrative game; when they feel unable to coerce the TAW into line with their own O-Worlds, life loses meaning.

This same principle applies on a larger scale in Ford’s work: the same values that drove Old Tietjens to suicide also drove Europe to war. Though the tone of “No More Parades” is jarring in comparison to that of “Some Do Not,” the same value system has given rise to both worlds. Tietjens’ father’s O-World could not support the strain of a

son having an affair with Valentine Wannop; Aristocratic England's O-World could not support the strain of challenged dominance on the world scene. In both cases, Ford is showing us that when Death is preferable to Dishonor, it is in fact inevitable. When honor is everything, it's easy to understand why the Light Brigade charged; when life without honor is seen as a fate worse than death, then the ancient sentiment that it is "sweet and proper to die for one's country" makes a kind of twisted sense.

When "Some Do Not" ends, Christopher has made his farewells and prepared himself for death. He isn't enlisting to help England win the war – he knows that with his great intelligence he'd do much more good at home, coordinating logistics. He's leaving because Sylvia won't divorce him and, at this early stage in the novel, his O-World won't let him be with the woman he loves.

Filled with Tietjens Compassion, and Yorkshire Pride and English Honor, Christopher Tietjens is on track to join his father in the afterlife. It is only once he goes to war that he is able to change; it takes the chaos and hell of the front lines and a perpetual struggle for life to convince him that life is worth living for its own merits, and honor and reputation be damned.

The suicide of Old Tietjens in "Some Do Not" serves to foreshadow the battlefields of "No More Parades" – indeed, to make them an inevitability, a certainty. The suicide in *Ulysses* of Rudolph Virag Bloom, by contrast, serves to undermine any sort of certainty.

The father of Leopold Bloom was a Jewish immigrant who later converted to Protestantism, married a Catholic and then killed himself – leaving behind Leopold to piece together a sense of identity. The fact that Rudolph was Jewish means that Leopold

Bloom can never quite fit into Christian Irish life, but the fact that Ellen Bloom was Catholic means that he is not accepted as Jewish under Jewish law. That Rudolph was an immigrant means that Bloom is forever a trespasser in the eyes of many native Dubliners, but the fact that Bloom was born in Ireland means he can call no other place home. The one precedent Rudolph has left for Bloom is suicide: he's left him with the realization that for a lonely man with no home, no friends and no identity, life isn't worth living.

Leopold Bloom is a man without a heritage or even a nation to call his own, and he suffers for it. His father's suicide severs his connection to any male line, while the death of Rudy ensures that he never starts his own. Bloom spends much of *Ulysses* emasculated – he's not respected by any of his peers, his wife is having an affair, and his daughter is dating a cad. In short, he seems to have much in common with what little we know of his widowed father. It's curious, then, that for all his suffering, Leopold Bloom never contemplates joining his father in suicide.

The details of Rudolph's suicide are kept deliberately vague – Joyce treats it as an *a priori* fact which causes a vague social discomfort for Bloom everywhere he goes. Though Bloom is by and large perceived to be the father figure throughout the text, it is the constant specter of Rudolph haunting him that forces us to remember that every father is also a son. Rudolph's death comes up repeatedly – first and most awkwardly in the carriage in Hades, where the other men callously discuss suicide, but also throughout the text in sudden flashes. Bloom can't even think about Hamlet without thinking about Ophelia's suicide which leads him, of course, back to Rudolph. Poor Papa, he thinks.

Stephen Dedalus has his own paternal problems to deal with – while Simon doesn't kill himself, he does allow his life to be ruined over the years by drink. Though



popular at parties and a good singer, Simon may as well be dead to Stephen, who values intellect and the poetic spirit, literature and philosophy. Just as Bloom's father seems to haunt the text, so does the still-living Simon Dedalus – he wanders around Dublin, telling jokes and borrowing money and basically being everything but a father to his children.

Though he does so in a careless, drunken, unintentional sort of way, Simon Dedalus represents everything that Rudolph Virag Bloom is unable to provide for his son: a national identity, a religious context, a long cultural tradition, etc. Simon is first and foremost an Irishman, a man with a place in the world and a firm identity. Not even years of alcohol abuse and poverty can strip this from him – he is, by virtue of his birth, a part of the community and a segment of a larger historical continuity. His identity is comprised of Fenian O-World properties – one must despise the British, one must love Parnell, and one must prefer Catholicism to Protestantism. Actual belief in God seems to be optional.

The natural order of things would see Simon passing on these values to his children – but Stephen rejects these “nets.” In *Portrait*, he makes a vow to “fly past” these cultural identifiers in an effort to secure some form of freedom. Stephen refuses to inherit the biases and obligations that an Irish Catholic Nationalist upbringing entails. Bloom, on the other hand, has no O-World as his birthright – his father's suicide has seen to that, and he must try to create his own.

Stephen may have a point – World War One is only possible because so many people are convinced of the reality of nationality, language, or religion. Like Ford, Joyce is aware of the dangers of a national O-World. Though Joyce deliberately sets his text 10 years before the war, he is writing in the 1920's and dropping various clues throughout

the text that the war is coming. Young Sargent, in *Nestor*, will be of military age when the war begins; Carr, the lout in *Circe*, provides a more noticeable military presence. In both cases, the military is tied to a larger historical context – Sargent is a student in Stephen's history class, while Carr stands for the English occupation.

It is precisely this historical context that Bloom lacks and that Stephen deplores – history is a nightmare, Stephen famously tells Mr. Deasy, from which he is trying to awaken. For Leopold, son of Rudolph, history is an inaccessible discontinuity. Which of these characters is better off is an interpretive question best left up to the reader.

Whereas Old Tietjens and Rudolph Virag Bloom each commit suicide, the father figure in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* remains almost conspicuously alive throughout the text. Though his best work is far behind him, Mr. Ramsay perseveres in his academic pursuits. He knows that he's not as brilliant as he was when he was young, however, and this causes him no end of despair – anyone who has read *To the Lighthouse* will remember his perpetual struggle with his own intellectual shortcomings. If the scale of human thought is arranged alphabetically, he thinks, then his understanding has achieved something in the vicinity of the letter Q. Very few people, he consoles himself, ever make it to Q. Still, it galls him that he cannot reach R – it is beyond him, and in the early part of the novel he is struggling to come to terms with his own limitations.

He imagines himself then to be the leader of a failed expedition in a desolate Polar region – his knowledge that he will never reach R helps to continue this metaphor, and he imagines pressing on as far as he can until finally night falls, and as the wind and snow engulfs the expedition, he prepares for death. In his mind, he stands to face death,

refusing to lie down as the cold takes him. And yet, when morning comes, he finds that he is still alive. In his self-pity, he imagines himself in exactly this situation, thinking -

Who shall blame the leader of the doomed expedition, if, having adventured to the uttermost, and used his strength wholly to the last ounce and fallen asleep not much caring if he wakes or not, he now perceives by some pricking in his toes that he lives, and does not on the whole object to live, but requires sympathy, and whisky, and someone to tell the story of his suffering to at once? Who shall blame him?

Mr. Ramsay is a man whose most ardent desire is to be remembered as a great philosopher. It troubles him that a stone he kicks will outlast Shakespeare, let alone himself, and this pathetic sense of worthlessness compels him to seek out attention and sympathy from everyone. Far from a valiant leader, he is generally perceived as a bully – he has Mrs. Ramsay’s affection and sympathy, of course, but his children fear him and the other characters find him somewhere between pathetic and disgusting, if brilliant.

Here is a man with a lovely family, but he sees them as a sort of consolation prize – his W-World is such that nothing short of academic fame into perpetuity will satisfy it, and he knows himself and what he is capable of well enough to understand that such a thing will elude him. He has no time for social niceties or paternal kindness – he’s too busy feeling sorry for himself that he’ll never reach R. Like Tietjens and like Virag, he seems to be in a position where he can no longer win the narrative game – he knows that he will never reach R, and so he knows that the TAW will never reflect his own inner worlds – yet he keeps going.

The only thing holding him together throughout “The Window,” it seems, is the genuine understanding of Mrs. Ramsay – she knows him, completely, and is able to soothe him. It’s almost as though she’s taking care of an emotional invalid, though we realize that she depends on him as much as he depends on her. They understand and

support each other, and they seem to go together perfectly – which is why it comes as such a heartrending shock when Mrs. Ramsay dies in “Time Passes.” The image of Mr. Ramsay reaching out hopelessly for her the next night emphasizes just how much he depends on her.

Suicide removes a character from the world before their natural time – Old Tietjens and Rudolph Virag Bloom each take with them a meaningful connection to the past. Mr. Ramsay is almost set up as a direct opposite: despite the fact that his utility is exhausted and his productive years are behind him, he persists in life. Devoid of further academic insight and bereft of the one person who unconditionally loved him, Mr. Ramsay seems like the perfect candidate for a third paternal suicide – but he comes to terms with life, instead.

As a young child, James Ramsay hates his father and would kill him out of oedipal rage if he could. That the two are almost emotional equals is a testament to Mr. Ramsay’s inability to relate to others. In the third section, “To the Lighthouse,” this primal dislike has matured into a calculated resentment – James doesn’t like being bossed around by his father, doesn’t like being made to feel perpetually inadequate, and doesn’t like being ruled by a man so emotionally underdeveloped. He sees his father as a tyrannical fool, a new Napoleon ruling by whim.

The pervading sense remains that everyone else in the novel would be much happier had Mr. Ramsay been the one to die – he makes everyone uncomfortable and inspires fierce hatred in his children when he’s not busy inspiring pity. Like old Tietjens, he represents the generation most directly responsible for World War One – however, unlike old Tietjens, he remains accessible.

His persistence has ultimately the greatest payoff of the three novels: at the end of the book, after James has resentfully steered their craft at long last to the Lighthouse, he proclaims “Well done!” With those two words, it’s almost as though he’s justified his presence in the entire novel, because he’s managed to bridge the generations. James and Mr. Ramsay are for a moment united, and the past – which had been kept isolated and distant in *Parade’s End* and *Ulysses* – is saved and embraced.

While Ryan’s W- and K- worlds are deeply personal and subjective, the O-World is most closely associated with a shared value system. *Parade’s End* shows us that this O-World is heritable and furthermore demonstrates the dangers of a self-perpetuating transgenerational value system. *Ulysses* shows us the emptiness that can be left when it’s removed. In both cases, paternal suicide has broken the chain of history and removed a vital connection to the past. Ford shows us that this isn’t always a bad thing, while Joyce shows us that sometimes it is.

Woolf takes a different route: in allowing Mr. Ramsay to live, she provides James an opportunity to come to terms with his past. This opportunity is denied to both Bloom and Tietjens, and while they both gain a degree of freedom, they must each sacrifice a part of their identity and a meaningful, supportive connection to the past.

### Spurned Union

All three novels under discussion contain characters who are looking for meaningful connections in their lives. Stephen and Bloom lack and are half-heartedly searching for a father and a son, respectively; *To the Lighthouse* can be summed up as a tale of a handful of people trying bravely to relate to each other. Christopher and Valentine spend a large portion of *Parade's End* skirting around their mutual feelings.

In each case, the reader wants certain characters to “get together” – we want a happy ending, where Bloom and Stephen face the future together as friends and surrogate family; we want Lily to marry William Bankes; we want to see Christopher and Valentine consummate their love in the face of all of their obstacles. This reveals an implication of Ryan’s theory: if, as she posits, the reader enters into the TAW through a process of recentering, then it stands to reason that the reader also has a stake in the narrative game. When the reader wants the text to unfold a certain way, that reader’s W-World is active. Though the reader’s stake in the narrative isn’t as complete as that of the other characters, and though the reader’s role in traditional print media is entirely passive, there is still a satisfaction in a happy ending and a sense of loss in a tragic ending.

In *Ulysses*, we see Stephen continually aloof from his companions – he resents Buck Mulligan, looks down on his racist employer, tells too-clever puns to his friends at the newspaper office, is offended by the other intellectuals at the library, picks fights with soldiers, and generally can’t get along with anyone. Similarly, Bloom is an out-of-place cuckold for whom nothing is sacred – he attempts awkwardly to tell ingratiating jokes, makes a spectacle of himself as he checks statues in the museum for anatomical correctness, detests making small talk with other people in the street, and in general

manages to rub people the wrong way so strongly that at one point he's even physically assaulted. Through a sense of empathy, the reader wants very much for these two outcasts to become close and live happily ever after.

Bloom and Stephen both have W-Worlds which compel them to seek each other out, and when they finally meet and talk, they seem to have much in common. What we don't expect – or at least don't want – is a world where Stephen rejects Bloom's offer of friendship, and yet that's how we end up.

Two outcasts weaving in and out of each others' lives, each a sensitive, intelligent and generally good person and each tormented by the inability to relate to others, seems like the set-up to a story where the two meet and strike up a beautiful friendship. But what Joyce gives us is a world that is too subtle and too complex for such a tidy wrap-up; there is a reason why each man is alone. Stephen is pretentious and arrogant, maintaining a haughty aloofness from everyone he talks to. This manifests itself from the very first chapter – he has nothing good to say about any of his roommates, instead resenting each in his turn for some contrived reason. He thrives on attention and adulation – he tells witty stories in *Aeolus* and *Oxen of the Sun* because he enjoys the fact that others think him clever, but he is hopelessly lost when it comes to any actual friendship. He simply feels so insecure in his intelligence and artistic temperament that, rather than simply relax and enjoy the company of others, he is constantly assessing their intelligence and, more importantly, their appraisal of his own intelligence. Given his express contempt for everyone around him, he's hardly a character well-suited to a happy ending arm in arm with Bloom – a man almost universally despised even by otherwise friendly people.

For Stephen to accept Bloom's offer, to settle for a happy, secure future as surrogate son and language tutor to a middle-class family on Eccles Street, would simply be out of character. Though Bloom is willing to give it a try, and though the reader wants the two to hit it off and begin a meaningful friendship predicated on mutual understanding and compassion, Stephen characteristically declines his invitation and slinks off into the night, alone. Joyce does not completely close the door on further developments in their friendship, but when we last see Stephen he is opting for isolation.

This conflict between the reader's wishes and characters' wishes occurs again in *To the Lighthouse*. Lily Briscoe is a progressive, independent woman who has a well-honed distrust of other people. A painter, she is terribly resistant to the idea of other people seeing her work in progress. She resents Mrs. Ramsay's controlling nature and takes satisfaction in the thought of the Rayley marriage she arranged being a disaster. She also abhors the sexism of Dedalus-like Charles Tansley, who deals with his own intellectual insecurities by telling her that women simply aren't cut out for artistic pursuits. She spends the first part of the novel exactly the same way as she spends the last: she is alone, though there are others near her, and she is working on her painting.

William Bankes is an older man, a widower, who greatly enjoys a life of privacy. Well-adjusted and secure in life, he was once very close with Mr. Ramsay. They have changed with age, however. Though William still sympathizes with Mr. Ramsay, he has a hard time relating to his insecurity. He is thoughtful and doesn't like to impose on others – which is precisely why he is the one person with whom Lily gets along very well. He doesn't look down on her experimental painting style, and he doesn't look down on her as a woman – he accepts her, and she respects him for this.



Both Lily and William enjoy spending time alone, observing others, and contemplating in private. This solitary temperament seems unnatural to Mrs. Ramsay, who is always in a hurry to set up couples, and it seems unnatural to the reader as well. When we learn that William Bankes is an old widower who also likes to be alone, and who gets along well with Lily, it seems natural that the two should get together. A long Western tradition associating weddings with happy endings no doubt has a role to play in the reader's desire to see the two of them united.

Again, a moment's thought will show that there's nothing about two loners that dictates that they should somehow end up together in the end – Lily likes William and William likes Lily, but neither one of them seems particularly interested in getting married, to each other or otherwise. A conventional plot would disregard such preferences and assume that single people want to get married. Envisioning the future from "The Window," it seems quite possible that William and Lily could get married and live happily ever after under the I-Knew-It gaze of Mrs. Ramsay, but it doesn't work out that way. Instead, Woolf selects a different world to actualize – one where Mrs. Ramsay is dead and William Bankes is a forgotten minor character from earlier in the text. Is this a happy ending to the question of Lily's marriage? It's a rejection of Mrs. Ramsay's World but an affirmation of Lily's. Whether or not the reader is satisfied is an open question.

Romantic connections aren't the only complicated relationships in the text; the novel is littered with scenes where one character wants desperately to be acknowledged, understood, and accepted by another. Mrs. Ramsay seems to be the only character

capable of empathizing with everyone else – she even sees the value in the otherwise deplorable Charles Tansley, feeling an affection for him that everyone else seems to lack.

She accomplishes this by understanding the other character's worldview – in Ryan's terms, she seems to have access to everyone else's K-World. Where others see Charles Tansley as an insufferable pompous ass, she sees him as a lonely young man trying desperately to please everyone without compromising his sense of integrity. Where others see Mr. Ramsay as an overbearing tyrant, she understands his behavior and knows how to help him remain calm and in control. She is able to smooth relations between others because she not only understands how they see the world, she understands how they see each other and she is able to act accordingly.

The banquet scene is her moment of glory – she communicates with everyone at the table, intuiting their desires and insecurities and doing her best to make sure that everyone feels gratified with the dinner and the company. She always manages to ask exactly the right question and bring up exactly the right topic. By the end of dinner everyone has had a good time. To an outsider, it probably looked easy – but Woolf shows how much attention Mrs. Ramsay pays to each guest, going so far as to silently enlist the aid of a reluctant Lily when Charles Tansley starts fishing for attention.

Though she shows remarkable insight when it comes to understanding other characters' perceptions, she seems to lack clarity when it comes to understanding their desires; she can read K-Worlds and even O-Worlds well, but when it comes to W-Worlds, she can be marvelously short-sighted. She tends to assume that everyone wants the same basic things, and in many cases she's right – but it's this lack of imagination that causes her to suppose that Lily and William Bankes would make a good couple. She

doesn't take a moment to consider that they might not want to marry, that they might be content as vaguely aloof loners who take pleasure in each others' occasional company.

In a novel where every character is as isolated as a ship at sea, Mrs. Ramsay provides connection, context and reassurance - in short, she is the lighthouse. She illuminates every ship sailing past, but she cannot know what course each follows and so assumes each one is looking for a harbor. When she dies, it is as though a light goes out – “The Lighthouse,” the third section, is rife with conflict and devoid of her easy empathy. The great task before the novel's surviving characters is simply to get along – no small challenge without the one person who understood everyone.

*Parade's End* also deals with this conflict between the reader's W-World and the characters' actions: Christopher and Valentine are in love, and we want them to get together. Most couples in their situation would throw O-Worlds to the winds and consummate their love – “some do not,” however, and as discussed above Christopher is not the sort of man to indulge in such dishonorable behavior. He is a married man, and the obligations that go with that status wage a constant war against his desires – and the desires of the reader.

Unlike *Ulysses* or *To the Lighthouse*, however, *Parade's End* is a novel about change. Though “Some Do Not” ends with a rejection, Christopher changes in the war. As he envisions a peaceful post-war life during “A Man Could Stand Up,” his sense of honor is overhauled, and abstinence from the great love of his life seems as absurd to him as it does to us. Why is he fighting in a meaningless war, suffering untold horror, if he cannot even be with the woman he loves?

Oddly, of all the characters under discussion, it is the most secure and well-developed character who changes most. Christopher is complete from the novel's opening pages – it's a testament to Ford's powers as an author that his further growth feels so natural. It would be easier for him to remain the same than it must be for, say, Stephen; yet Stephen remains the model of stasis, trapped forever in a present which isolates him from everyone else.

By making Christopher's evolution and growth the subject of the novel, Ford takes a radical departure from Joyce and Woolf. *Ulysses* and *To the Lighthouse* both struggle with the idea of accepting a nonconformist on his or her own terms. Stephen and Lily are both artists, driven by an inner desire to break with convention and create something new, be it with his writing or her painting or their stubborn rejection of conventional social roles. Both characters lack a secure sense of identity: Stephen craves validation but not from anyone willing to give it to him, while Lily spends a great deal of time musing about the nature of human relationships and her own eccentricities.

Of the three characters, it is Christopher who is able to overcome his inhibitions and accept a happy ending. He is a simple character when the book opens, and he stays that way: he is defined by a handful of principles, and it takes a cataclysm to make them waver. When they do, he doesn't become an entirely different person – just a slightly more complex person, willing to actualize an APW that he wouldn't have allowed himself previously.

As *To the Lighthouse* draws to a close, Lily too finds a sense of peace: she finally finishes her painting, finally comes to terms with the events of the text. She has seen Mr. Ramsay in an entirely new light and in so doing has opened her eyes to a world where

individuality doesn't necessitate isolation. Mr. Carmichael, envisioned by Lily in a single transcendent moment as an ancient deity, raises his arms and blesses all of humanity. In drawing her final line, Lily creates a sense of balance between self and other and in the final analysis finds peace. Stephen, on the other hand, does not. He returns to the night, hopefully some day to have his own vision and gain the ability to join the human race.

Just as a father's suicide serves as a model for the auto-destructive values of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, a relationship spurned for the sake of individual eccentricity serves as an ideal model for the fragmented present. In the years leading up to the war, the various European nation-states were embroiled in an increasingly complex web of alliances. When tension mounted, these alliances became chains – they compelled countries which had very much in common to see each other as utterly alien.

World War One not only took away the past, it demolished the present. Joyce and Woolf both incorporate some of this fragmented present into their own work – their characters cling to petty alliances with past values, sacrificing their happiness on the altar of maintaining a consistent sense of identity. Ford also incorporates this sense of isolation in "Some Do Not," but he moves away from that mentality and allows Christopher to change with the times.

Ford is chronicling the end of an era, not the destruction of a human being – in allowing Tietjens to change with the times, to adapt his personality to the historical narrative unfolding around him, Ford allows him to come to terms with the present in a way that eludes the characters of both Joyce and, for most of her novel, Woolf. In doing so, he creates for himself a happy ending in a world where everything else is burning to

the ground. If, as Woolf suggests, persistence and empathy help us to retain the past, then willingness to change is how we preserve the present.

### Birth as Death

The third theme I'd like to examine is a conflation between birth and death, old age and childhood. This takes place across all three texts - Prue Ramsay dies in childbirth during "Time Passes," and Bloom's son Rudy has died in infancy; the first few pages of Ford's "No More Parades" provide the reader with a defamiliarized, infantile look at the chaos and destruction of the war while his depiction of Mark's death ends with a nursery rhyme.

*Parade's End* makes much of this conflation. "No More Parades" opens with a flurry of sensory impressions, all delivered in the second person –

When you came in the space was desultory, rectangular, warm after the drop of the winter night, and transfused like the house a child draws. Three groups of brown limbs spotted with brass took dim high-lights from shafts that came from a bucket pierced with holes, filled with incandescent coke and covered in with a sheet of iron in the shape of a funnel. Two men, as if hierarchically smaller, crouched on the floor beside the brazier; four, two at each end of the hut, drooped over tables in attitudes of extreme indifference. From the eaves above the parallelogram of black that was the doorway fell intermittent drippings of collected moisture, persistent, with glass-like intervals of musical sound. The two men squatting on their heels over the brazier – they had been miners – began to talk in a low sing-song of dialect, hardly audible. It went on and on...

The text continues in this strange tone for several pages before finally coalescing into a concrete scene. Entry into the narrative space in this passage can be compared to the entry of a child into the world, a strange place filled with odd shapes and sounds but no concrete entities. Echoes can be heard of the opening pages of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where the narrator's tone is a reflection of young Stephen Dedalus's childhood impressions. Nothing has a name at first – everything is a shape, a sound, a color, or a smell.

Gradually, patterns emerge. The figures take discernable shape, personalities are assigned to the individuals. Then, identities - we finally learn, as we vaguely suspected, that one of the men is Tietjens, now a Captain, and that we have joined him in the trenches. Though he is the protagonist and central figure of the text, Tietjens is at first described only as one of two captains, “almost middle-aged and heavy.” It is as though the war has erased all K-World properties – everything, every detail about reality, must be relearned and reclaimed.

To open a novel in this way, as Joyce does in *Portrait*, is to explore the singular experience of childhood – but to open the middle segment of a much larger novel this way, throwing out 300-odd pages of characterization and identity, suggests a change of cataclysmic proportions. Indeed, another birth has taken place between the closing pages of “Some Do Not” and the opening of “No More Parades” – Christopher Tietjens has been reborn. In “No More Parades,” he does not receive a name until he has been defined by his concern for his situation. He is “burdened with the command of a unity of unreasonable size, with a scratch headquarters of useless subalterns who were continually being changed, with N.C.O.s all unwilling to work, with rank and file nearly all colonials and unused to doing without things, and with a depot to draw on that, being old and established, felt that it belonged exclusively to a regular British unit and resented his drawing anything at all...” He is not the same man he was in “Some Do Not,” he does not have the same concerns, and he is no longer suicidal – rather, his sense of duty has charged him with the care of almost 3000 men, and he’s doing his best to keep each of them alive.



The introductory chapter of “No More Parades” opens with birth, the emergence of a nascent perspective onto a battlefield, but it ends in death: O-Nine-Morgan, recently denied leave by Tietjens, is killed by an artillery shell. Tietjens had denied him leave because it was a well-known fact that his wife was having an affair with a professional fighter, and Tietjens feared that if allowed to go home he would only get into a fight with and be killed by the fighter. It shocks him as the body is wheeled out that everyone else there knows why he denied him leave. As the chapter ends, Tietjens is marveling about the channels of communication open in the army. “I wonder what the hell you fellows don’t know and all! If anything went wrong with one it would be all over the command in two days...”

“The Last Post” also opens with a description of a structure – but it lacks the defamiliarized perspective of “No More Parades.” Mark Tietjens is on his deathbed, suffering from an acute case of Yorkshire Pride. He has vowed never to speak again, and indeed refuses to move; he entertains the notion of grinning at an amusing thought, but refrains because “that might have been seen.” The geographic location, characters involved, and explanation of the circumstances are all established immediately – Mark is in the final throes of O-World induced suicide.

This is relevant to the discussion because Mark has reduced himself to a second state of infancy, unwilling to communicate or to experience life. But his is not an infancy free of K-World properties, since he knows better than anyone else what’s going on; rather, it’s an infancy of complete helplessness. Unable to change the TAW to reflect his O-World, he feels defeated in the narrative game and effectively stops playing. He is

here characterized as utterly distinct from Christopher, who represents change and motion and life.

It is Christopher who is able to forgive Britain for its many blunders; it is Christopher who is now making his living by the sweat of his brow. It is Christopher who is creating a new life for himself in a new world – but it is also Christopher who saves a piece of Great Groby Tree, the symbol of everything the Tietjens family had represented. His ability to change and accept a new present has allowed him to come to terms with the past while also facing a future. Mark, dying, is unable to exist in the present, and so he reverts to a second infancy. He is powerless to exert any influence on the world around him but more importantly powerless to communicate – his K-World is all but severed from that of everyone else, complete though it may be.

“The Last Post” is a eulogy for a world incapable of change and incompatible with the new reality – which is exactly why there is no room in this closing chapter for Christopher, who is present for all of a harried two pages at the end.

Both “No More Parades” and “The Last Post” associate death with birth, and each deals extensively with K-World dynamics. The former presents a visceral experience, deliberately confounding the reader and thereby causing him to reevaluate his understanding of the textual world. The latter presents a myriad of K-Worlds, each isolated from the others through some sort of barrier – Mark won’t speak, Marie is isolated by her French language and heritage, Cramp is a poor farmer with a perspective completely alien to that of the upper- and middle-class characters around him, etc. The great public K-World to which everyone had conformed in “No More Parades,” leading to a communal understanding of the world around them, has been replaced by this

isolation – nobody is entirely sure what anyone else is thinking, and the fraternity brought about by the war is replaced with a sense of isolation.

The fragmentation in “The Last Post” is strongly evocative of *To the Lighthouse*, which features similarly isolated characters throughout the text. Here too death and life go hand in hand – James and Cam, in “The Window,” share their room with an overt metaphor for impending death in the form of a boar’s head. The youngest of the Ramsay children, they have divergent reactions to this eerie presence: it scares Cam, disturbing her sleep, but it excites Jack, who protests its removal. As a compromise, Mrs. Ramsay sacrifices her shawl to cover it. This set piece serves as a metaphor for the parent/child relationship here at play – Mrs. Ramsay, a protective parent, wants to shield her children from the inevitability of aging and death. The best she can do, however, is to cover it. The skull will emerge on its own as time passes and death strikes whimsically across the family and across the world.

Here, too, the K-World is the most relevant of Ryan’s concepts. In a novel preoccupied with isolated individuals striving to understand each other and the world at large, death looms as a great equalizer. Lily sees in Andrew a brilliant mind and a productive future; Mrs. Ramsay sees in Prue a great beauty and a happy life. The fundamental unpredictability of death serves to undermine these certainties, however, as both children are swept away with the irresistible force of time and decay.

More jarring than either of those deaths, however, is that of Mrs. Ramsay herself. She is the closest thing the novel has to a protagonist throughout “The Window.” Her ability to get along with everyone, her privileged insights into the world around her, and the way everyone else depends on her are all factors which contribute to a sense that she

stabilizes the entire framework of the novel. When the characters return in section three, that stability has been removed – the result is similar to what we get in the beginning of “No More Parades,” where every relationship has to be redefined. The reader’s K-World has once more been disrupted – everything is different. Cam and James are grown now, and Lily is more secure in herself. Even Mr. Carmichael, the old man with the drug-stained beard, has been reborn: he’s gone from depressive antisocial layabout to respected poet. He is characterized at the end as an ancient pagan god, granting his blessing to humanity.

Vestiges of the past remain. Mr. Ramsay is still to some extent self-centered – and yet even he gets a rare moment of genuine empathy and compassion, commending James on his steering. He too has in a sense grown up, no longer the emotional equivalent of a child. The death of Mrs. Ramsay has freed him somewhat, at least partially forced him to shed a worldview whereby he is entitled to everyone’s sympathy. When he stands making small talk with Lily, she sees the man she knew ten years earlier and begrudges him what she perceives to be an unreasonable unspoken demand for sympathy. It is only as the conversation ends, when she compliments him on his boots and witnesses his genuine pleasure at their mention, that she sees him as though for the first time – she recognizes in him a human being seeking contact with other human beings, and instantly regrets the resentment she’d been harboring.

James, too, bases his perception of his father on the past. He has a vague traumatizing memory of the opening scene of the novel, where his father tormented him with the fact that inclement weather would preclude the much-desired lighthouse trip. It’s worth noting that Mrs. Ramsay foresaw that young James would remember his

disappointment – her insights persist despite her death, time and entropy unable to entirely do away with her K-World. James’s resentment has lasted through the years and is shared to a lesser extent by Cam – both see their father as a tyrant. Each, during the trip to the lighthouse, reevaluates that view – Cam is overwhelmed by genuine love and affection for him, and James is gratified by a single compliment.

“The Lighthouse” is made up of a series of rebirths – characters getting to know themselves and each other as though for the first time, stepping away from decade-old biases. Though it has taken death, decay, and change to bring about this refreshing of the K-Worlds, the change in perspective allows for a satisfactory resolution to most of the novel’s conflicts.

It’s ironic that the two texts with the most concretely “happy” endings are the ones without anything good to say about birth itself – Christopher’s uncertainty as to his son’s paternity and Prue’s sudden death as a complication of her pregnancy serve to reinforce the idea that the inevitability of death is the only dependable K-World property.

The only text which sees a joyous celebration of healthy childbirth is *Ulysses* – which is ironic, since the birth happens to a minor character with little to no bearing on the narrative at large. Leopold Bloom, protagonist, has had his own son die in infancy – which makes the birth of a healthy baby boy to Mina Purefoy into something more akin to a cruel joke than a celebration of life. The body of an infant with a white knit lambkin is by far the representative image of childbirth in Joyce’s text, not Mina Purefoy’s latest addition to her overlarge family.

*Ulysses* is driven in part by two deaths, that of a mother and that of a child. Stephen’s mother died a year before the story takes place, prompting his early return

from France and coloring his attitude toward life, death, God, and other people. Her death has had a profound impact on his personality and outlook, causing him to see death everywhere. It has put a stark emphasis on his religious views – his own refusal to kneel and pray in compliance with her dying wish has shaken him, causing religious considerations and repressed guilt to swell to the surface even under jovial circumstances (such as the blasphemous discussion in *Oxen of the Sun*, punctuated by a thunderclap that horrifies him, or the emergence of his mother's dead visage in *Circe*). Yeats's poetry reminds him of the vigil he kept as she lay dying, requesting that he sing to her. Even Dublin Bay becomes little more than a reminder of the bowl into which she threw up as the disease slowly killed her. Stephen is reminded of mortality everywhere.

He is also troubled by the idea of posterity – he has dedicated himself vocally and frequently to a poet's life, yet he is unable to produce anything meaningful. The possibility that his life's dream is stillborn, that he is incapable of producing great art, has a devastating effect on him and serves only to reinforce his insecurity and his inability to relate to others. In spite of Stephen's resentment towards Buck Mulligan, Mulligan understands and sympathizes with him. "Wandering Aengus," he calls him in *Wandering Rocks*. "They drove his wits astray, by visions of hell. He will never capture the Attic note. The note of Swinburne, of all poets, the white death and the ruddy birth. That is his tragedy. He can never be a poet. The joy of creation ..."

The other death driving the text is that of Bloom's son, Rudy. The effect it (and, to a lesser extent, the death of his father, as discussed above) has on him is very similar to the effect Stephen's mother's death has had on the young poet – Bloom is reminded of the death constantly. He cannot see a dog without remembering the copulating dogs

which he associates with Rudy's conception; he, like Stephen, cannot quite participate in the jovial banter in hospital – childbirth is at once sacred and horrific to him. All of his hopes for the future of his line are buried with a little white lambkin, and he has a hard time forgetting it. In the last moments of Circe, an image of an alternate possible world long since committed to the realm of mere nonactualized possibility manifests itself to him: he sees Rudy, 8 years old, well-dressed, and steeped in tradition and context with his Eton coat and his Talmudic studies.

Perhaps this is why in Hades he is the only one who seems truly wrapped up in the idea of death – the other men in his carriage treat the funeral as primarily a social occasion, telling stories and exchanging jokes, but Bloom spends a good deal of time ruminating on the concept of mortality. He thinks of his father, wonders what kind of love life the graveyard's caretaker and his wife have given the fact that they live in a cemetery, has an idea for a tram system as a more efficient alternative to hearses, and, as they finish the burial, thinks of the coffin band as an umbilical cord – death is another birth, an entry into another world populated by everyone who has died before.

This image echoes Gabriel Conroy's thoughts as he watches the snow falling at the end of "The Dead" – he realizes that it covers everyone, living and dead, together. There too Joyce evokes the idea of death not as an ending but rather as a connection to a larger, coherent whole. The theme can be found again in *Finnegans Wake* – "Night Lessons" ends with the "NIGHTLETTER," which demonstrates malleability of life and the wide-ranging possibilities intrinsic to a system which allows reincarnation:

With our best youlldied greedings to Pep and Memmy and the old folkers below and beyant, wishing them all very merry Incarnations in this land of the livvey and plenty of preprosperousness through their coming new yonks

from  
jake, jack and little sousoucie  
(the babes that mean too)

Joyce demonstrates in all of these works a fascination with the idea of reincarnation, or *metempsychosis* to use the Greek. His preoccupation with this idea further cements the association between birth and death. Each death becomes an opportunity for new life – a concept already explored in both *Parade's End* and *To the Lighthouse*. The resetting of K-World properties is also well represented in the Greek notion of reincarnation, dating back to *The Republic* –

In the eschatological myth which closes the *Republic* [Plato] tells the story how Er, the son of Armenius, miraculously returned to life on the twelfth day after death and recounted the secrets of the other world. After death, he said, he went with others to the place of Judgment and saw the souls returning from heaven and from purgatory, and proceeded with them to a place where they chose new lives, human and animal. He saw the soul of Orpheus changing into a swan, Thamyras becoming a nightingale, musical birds choosing to be men, the soul of Atalanta choosing the honours of an athlete. Men were seen passing into animals and wild and tame animals changing into each other. *After their choice the souls drank of Lethe and then shot away like stars to their birth.* (Emphasis added)

If a drink of the forgetful waters of the Lethe is an integral part of the entire metempsychotic process, then the association between birth, death and a blank K-World goes back at least as far as Plato. Time and again in *To the Lighthouse* and *Parade's End* we've seen death manifest itself as a dramatic shift in the K-Worlds of the characters. *Ulysses* is no different.

If those who have died take a drink from the Lethe and thus forget everything, clearing away all properties of their K-Worlds, what has happened to Bloom and Stephen to give them what appears to be the opposite effect? Each continues to live, and each seems exceptionally sensitive to the events they've endured. If the Lethe is the river of



forgetfulness, then the deaths of their loved ones seem to have acted like a sip from the Mnemosyne. In the Greek tradition, the Mnemosyne was the opposite of the Lethe – to drink from it was to remember everything.

Bloom and Stephen aren't distinguished for having large K-Worlds – they are intelligent and well-read, and thus know more about the world than some, but so are most of their associates. What sets them apart is the way they are in constant contact with even the most far-flung parts of their respective K-Worlds. It is this state of communion with the past that is brought about by the deaths of their respective loved ones; it is the presence of death in their own lives that makes them think of death whenever birth is mentioned; it is the sense of termination, the idea that each represents the end of his own line, that compels them to look beyond this life and think of birth whenever death comes up.

Both Bloom and Stephen seem to represent endpoints in their respective lines; Bloom has no surviving male heir, while Stephen has no magnum opus to vindicate his dedication to the arts. Mina Purefoy's pregnancy and childbirth, as well as the accompanying progression of the English language, illustrate a continuity that's larger than any individual character or even family line. In this sense, Joyce joins Woolf and Ford in demonstrating a salvageable future.

However, just as he denies his protagonists a positive connection to the past and a meaningful connection to others in the present, Joyce cuts them off from this future – they are isolated in time, cut off from their backgrounds, unable to relate to others around them, and damned to exist forever in 1904.

Each of the three texts reinforces the idea that birth and death are inseparable – each treats death, both figuratively and literally, as a clean slate and a gateway to a fresh perspective on the world – but each also ties its respective author to a distinct moment in history: World War One destroyed an entire generation of children and in the process caused Europe to see the world in a new light. The front lines weren't populated by Blooms or even Stephens – they were populated mostly by Sargents, or Andrew Ramsays, and their deaths in a meaningless war brought to light the meaninglessness of old Victorian values.

It is in this context that Wilfred Owen famously wrote about the hollowness of patriotic and jingoistic ideals, tying ignorance to death in his own way:

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie: *Dulce et Decorum est*  
*Pro patria mori.*

## Conclusion

Using Possible Worlds Theory, I have examined several themes that recur throughout Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. By making use of the various modal systems Ryan discusses, I was able to reconstruct perspectives in each novel that were entirely relative to the characters involved. I was then able to explore the way the novels interacted with one another on a theme-by-theme basis.

For instance, I was able to compare and contrast the O-Worlds of Christopher Tietjens and Leopold Bloom vis-à-vis the suicides of their fathers. In each case, the father represents cultural context: Christopher's left him with an old-world value system and a strong sense of honor, while Bloom's left him with a discernable absence of either. This value system, analogous to an O-World in Ryan's system, can be oppressive: Stephen Dedalus rejects the O-World his Fenian upbringing demands, and Christopher Tietjens spends most of *Parade's End* gradually learning to reinterpret the world according to his own standards.

However, a heritable O-World also provides a stable sense of identity. Lacking one, Bloom is cut off from everyone, seeming to lack all cultural context. It's telling that in Bloom's haunting image of Rudy, the child is wearing an Eton coat and reading Hebrew: in Bloom's ideal future, he would have provided Rudy with both the British and Jewish cultural contexts which he himself was denied. Both Old Tietjens and Rudolph Virag Bloom commit suicide, and in each case it severs their offspring from some degree of obligation – to Christopher, this means freedom. To Bloom, however, the lack of identity proves as oppressive as any inherited O-World property.

I also looked at the idea of a spurned union, which manifested itself across all three texts. Stephen Dedalus spends June 16 just as isolated as Bloom, but his isolation doesn't stem from a lack of inherited identity – it stems from a rejection of inherited identity. Stephen's W-World is such that he refuses to accept anyone else's O-Worlds. As he snidely tells Haines in *Telemachus*, he feels himself to be the servant of two masters, an English and an Italian. He resents the fact that as a Catholic he is obligated to adhere to Catholic law, and he resents the fact that as an Irishman he is obligated to adhere to English law. He wants to fly by these O-Worlds as surely as he desires to fly by the nets of his own Irish heritage, and this desire for freedom manifests itself in a profoundly adverse personality. In the end, his W-World puts him in direct conflict with everyone, up to and including the reader, who wants a happy ending. In choosing his own isolation, he differs from Bloom but shares a trait with Lily Briscoe.

Lily, like Stephen, is uninterested in social convention and tradition. A fellow artist, she enjoys experimental painting styles and feels threatened by those who demand conformity. Both she and Stephen prefer isolation, and neither seems entirely satisfied with life. Lily, however, has an epiphany that eludes Stephen: in Mr. Ramsay, a man who up until that point utterly is alien to herself, she manages to find a kindred spirit. She is able to stop running from humanity and rejoin the human race without compromising her sense of identity – an achievement we can only hope Stephen will one day match.

Christopher also denies himself a meaningful relationship – at least at first. His initial rejection of Valentine stems from a conflict between his O-World and his W-World. As the novel progresses, he undergoes a rebirth and becomes able to put aside the

oppressive restrictions imposed by his strict moral code. He doesn't reject morality altogether, but he does learn that inability to change is tantamount to stagnation that can only end in death. This is demonstrated time and again, by his father, his brother, and Europe at large in the war.

This revision of perspective as experienced by Tietjens ties into the third theme I explored, the conflation between birth and death. In all three novels, death functions on a literal as well as a metaphorical level. "No More Parades" gives birth to an infantile narrative voice in the middle of a war zone; "The Lighthouse" challenges decade-old impressions of its characters, returned after time passes and takes its toll on the family; Rudy Bloom, appearing at the end of *Circe* in all his unactualized glory, ties together past, present, and future in a way that continues to elude the protagonists of *Ulysses*. Everywhere these authors show us birth, they show us death – and everywhere they show us death, they show us rebirth. In every case, this rebirth is associated with a resetting of K-World properties. Death is the great equalizer, undermining certainty and forcing a reevaluation of perspective.

By analyzing the O-World implications of a father's suicide, the W-World implications of a spurned union and the K-world implications of an identity between birth and death, I've demonstrated the commonalities among three important works in Modernist literature. *Parade's End* and *To the Lighthouse* each have what can be considered a happy ending – in each case, the protagonists' O-, W-, and K-Worlds attain some degree of satisfaction.

Christopher Tietjens is able at last to face the future with Valentine Wannop in one arm and a piece of Great Groby tree in the other. Lily Briscoe finally has her vision

– she finds a point of balance between self and other, between artistic integrity and integration into humanity. Mr. Ramsay and his son James acknowledge each other and come to terms with their differences, bridging a generational divide to share a moment of transcendent mutual understanding.

Such transcendence continues to elude the characters of *Ulysses*, however. Stephen still feels isolated and oppressed by his perceived O-World obligations, and Bloom is just as aloof as ever. Each character is bound to the past while at the same time managing to remain cut off from a larger historical continuity. Whereas Christopher and Lily were each able to come to terms with past and present and thereby embrace the future, Stephen and Bloom both remain in stasis. If anyone, it is Molly Bloom who has an affirming first step on the road to fulfillment: in the closing passage of the text, she seems to be coming to terms with her own personal history vis-à-vis her relationship with Leopold Bloom. Whether the morning of June 17 brings any significant change to the dysfunctional dynamics of the Bloom family remains to be determined.

These texts relate not only to each other but to the larger context of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The preoccupation with historical discontinuity, the emphasis on fragmentation and isolation and the conflation of birth and death all evoke the chaos of the First World War. Ford Madox Ford, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce were each writing in the shadow of the most horrific conflict humanity had ever experienced. Perhaps the element that binds these three disparate texts together is the idea that the future is open – no matter what destruction the historical narrative includes, its final pages have yet to be written and its final plot has yet to solidify. Whether they allowed their characters a happy ending or not, it is clear that each author was writing toward

personal agency and choice as an ideal to be sought – which is exactly how Ryan characterizes the narrative game.

In order, then, to write a satisfactory conclusion to our own narratives, it is important to come to terms with the past and embrace the present. It is only by saving a piece of Great Groby Tree and embracing the demands of his own W-World that Christopher is able to salvage a future for himself. The only other path available path would be to join Stephen, cut off from any sense of peace or meaningfulness, as he slinks back keyless into the night.

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